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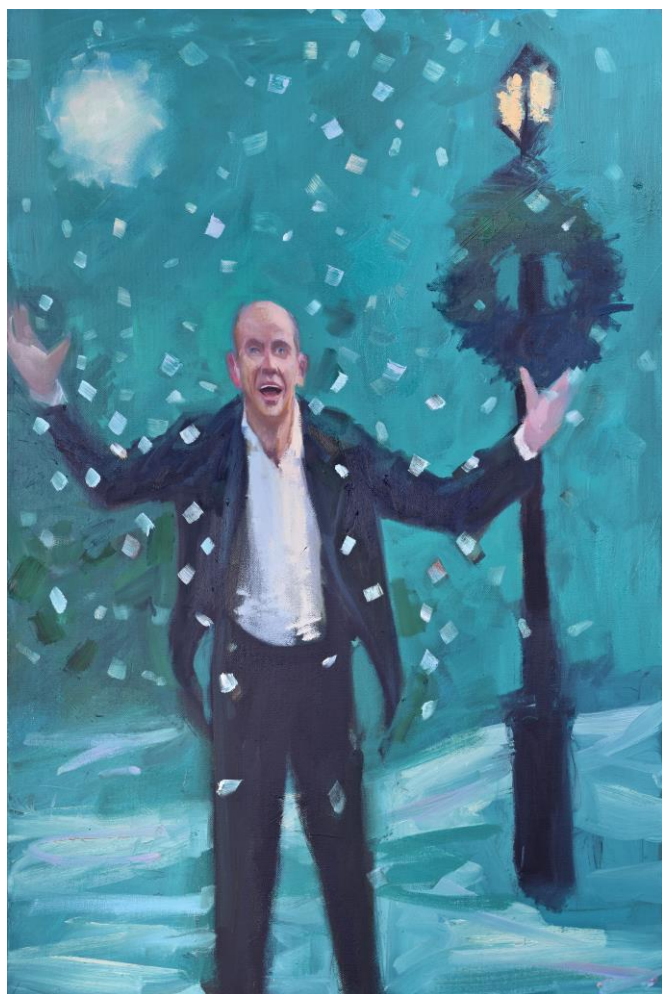
THIS WONDERFUL LIFE

by Steve Murray

streaming
December 1, 2020 –
January 3, 2021

from the
OneAmerica
Mainstage

filmed by WFYI



STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg
with contributions by
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THIS WONDERFUL LIFE

by Steve Murray

conceived by Mark Setlock

adapted from the screenplay *It's a Wonderful Life*

by Frances Goodrich, Albert Hackett, Frank Capra, & Jo Swerling

Frank Capra's iconic holiday movie *It's a Wonderful Life* provides the springboard for a spirited and heartwarming performance as a man in love with the film enacts and reacts to its classic characters and content. Indy-based actor Rob Johansen takes on this witty tour de force as he recreates more than 30 characters at madcap speed. In this time-honored story, it's Christmas Eve and a distraught George Bailey is sure he has failed his family and community. Clarence, an angel-in-waiting, helps George see how vital a role he's played in the world and ultimately shares the effect that one hardworking man's life has on the people around him. Celebrate the season with theatrical magic, joyfully reimagined for our times.

STREAMING December 1 – January 3, 2021

LENGTH Approximately 1 hour, 20 minutes

AGE RANGE Recommended for grades 8–12

*Rob Johansen in the IRT's 2020 production of
This Wonderful Life. Photo by Zach Rosing.*



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THE STORY OF *THIS WONDERFUL LIFE*

Although *It's a Wonderful Life* is now known as an American film classic, the film did not start out as the great success it is today. The film began its journey as a holiday greeting. Phillip Van Doren Stern wrote a short story, *The Greatest Gift*, but could not get it published. The story was about a man who decides the world would be better without him and tries to commit suicide on Christmas, but is stopped by an angel who shows him what the world would be like if he had never been born. The man realizes the good he has done and decides he wants to live again. Stern believed the story was worth sharing, so he sent it out as a Christmas card. One of those cards eventually got into the hands of a producer who bought the film rights. Three different screenwriters tried to write the script, but failed.

After World War II, Frank Capra, a respected director, was introduced to the story and bought the rights to the story and all three original scripts. Working with screenwriters Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett (who would later write the stage and film adaptations of *The Diary of Anne Frank*), Capra began work on a fourth version of the story. The result was *It's a Wonderful Life*. This script created an intriguing balance between reality and fantasy, humor and seriousness, dark and light, giving the story life and keeping an audience interested for two hours. Capra found his George Bailey in Jimmy Stewart, another World War II veteran who was looking to restart his career in Hollywood. The other actors came together as a mixture of old and new faces.

The movie was filmed on a set built in the middle of the desert. Depicting changing seasons in the film took a lot of work; since the movie was filmed during the summer, the snowstorm in particular represented a big challenge. Capra disliked the usual method of creating fake snow using Epsom salts and cornflakes, which were so loud that dialogue had to be dubbed later. Special effects supervisor Russell Shearman developed a new technique for making fake snow using foamite (a fire-fighting chemical), soap, and water. This mixture was pumped at high pressure through a wind machine to create silent falling snow. Six thousand gallons of the new snow were used in the film. The RKO Effects Department received a special award from the Motion Picture Academy for the development of the new film snow.

The climax of the movie is set during Christmas, but the film was not intended as a Christmas release until a few weeks before the holiday season. Reviews of the movie were mixed. Although not the flop that legend might have it, the film was not the success Capra hoped it would be. It was nominated for five Academy Awards, including Best Picture, but it did not win any.

The film was sold and resold to various companies after its release. When the film's copyright expired in 1974, through an oversight it was not renewed. Television stations could now show the film at no cost, and soon it became a constant presence during the Christmas season. Today it is hard to find someone who is not familiar with *It's a Wonderful Life*, and the film appears on multiple top film lists. Although the film is more than a just heartwarming Christmas story, to some people it just isn't Christmas without *It's a Wonderful Life*.

FINDING THE WONDERFUL

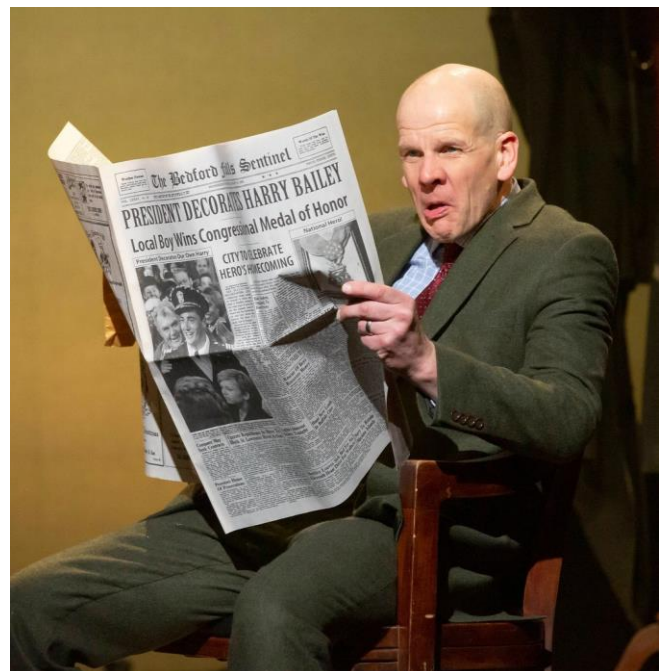
BY JANET ALLEN, MARGOT LACY ECCLES ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Our platform for making art at the IRT has changed enormously in the past few months. Battling our way through COVID protocol and safety concerns sometimes seems like only the tip of the iceberg. We have an immense need, as a community, to come together and help heal human divisiveness. Stories matter more than ever now. While we can't literally be together, we can offer storytelling that brings us together, and that's what we've embraced as the best way to keep our mission vibrant and necessary in these challenging times.

To launch our "theatrical storytelling in the time of COVID" series, we have looked into the annals of IRT stage history and American popular culture and plucked out a story that has been celebrated in many different forms. We first produced *This Wonderful Life* by Steve Murray on the Upperstage in 2008. The play's title is perhaps ironic in our current time. Some days it's hard to find what's wonderful in everyday American life amid a pandemic that separates and frightens us. That's the same dilemma (without the virus) that George Bailey comes up against in the 1946 film on which the play is based, *It's a Wonderful Life*. George can't see how his life could have meaning. How many of us feel similarly these days?

We picked this play for a variety of reasons: we very much wanted to find a holiday piece that would gather people virtually, if not physically, around the idea of the best of American traditions: rediscovering community, reigniting individual purpose, and reinventing the essence of family celebrations. For many American families, the shared viewing of *It's a Wonderful Life* (or its 103-year antecedent, *A Christmas Carol*) is the touchstone of the winter holidays. But the piece also brings us into direct contact with another important American ideal central to our country's debates today: what makes a good person? What role do we each play in improving our small circle of influence? Is that role limited only to self-interest, or does it ask us to open our hearts to better view how we can help others?

George Bailey develops serious doubts about his own mental health. He experiences frightening economic hardship, a dim view of his family's future, and the deepest of human disquiets: would his family be better off without him? Against the stark background of a pandemic, these questions feel close to home, as survival and mental health challenges have taken on deeper and more urgent meaning. As the Storyteller in the play says, "he found his way home again." Through this pandemic, our concepts of home and safety are redefined almost daily as we struggle with worry about our far-flung family members and when we will see them again. Thus, a story that asks questions about what is home has real resonance and





reverberation. And when George returns home at the end of the play, sweeping his family members into his arms, we all feel deeply his relief, mixed with our own longing for a time we can safely hug our loved ones near and far.

Also central to our decision to reopen with *It's a Wonderful Life* was our delightful realization that it could be fully enlivened by one of Indianapolis's favorite performing artists: Rob Johansen, who has frequently been seen on IRT's stages and elsewhere around the city. If, as suggested by film historian Stephen Handzo, *It's a Wonderful Life* is *A Christmas Carol* told from Bob Cratchit's perspective, then we've really got the right guy! Rob has played Bob Cratchit 11 times at the IRT and counts it among his favorite roles. Moreover, Rob is perhaps our city's greatest chameleon. He

can morph from character to character in the blink of an eye (an attribute we enjoyed in *The Mystery of Irma Vep* and *The 39 Steps*, to name only two!), and it's clear that he thoroughly enjoys it. Rob has done two other one-person shows for us over the years—*Underneath the Lintel* in 2006 and *After Paul McCartney* in 2010—so we've been the lucky beneficiaries of his immense skills in this form. We all know that Rob is fully in his element when he can interact directly with an audience, but I'm sure he will find new ways to completely charm us through the lens of WFYI's cameras, touching our hearts as we sit in our homes enjoying his performance.

We need hope these days. We need radical empathy. We need to believe that individual lives merit lifting and celebrating. We welcome you to a wild new chapter in IRT's life!

opposite & above:

Rob Johansen in the IRT's 2020 production of This Wonderful Life. Photo by Zach Rosing.

LEADING WITH OUR HEARTS

BY BENJAMIN HANNA, DIRECTOR

Originally inspired by a holiday card, *It's a Wonderful Life* is the most inspirational film of all time, according to the American Film Institute. Watching the film has become a tradition for many families as the weather grows cold and we begin our winter hibernation. But this year things are more than a little different. Many have been in isolation from family for months, and the looming winter feels chillier and darker than the past.

I am writing from our cozy rehearsal room. The four of us—actor, director, production coordinator, and production assistant—will be together, masked-up, socially distanced, and isolated for several weeks preparing to film. Among many safety measures, there are elaborate cleaning protocols and multiple, repeating COVID tests. We four alone are allowed in what is called “Zone A” inside the theatre. To connect with others, we schedule Zoom meetings with colleagues who are working on the other side of a wall—or working from home on the other side of town. A year ago there were more than 25 people in this room rehearsing for *A Christmas Carol*, including ten ubiquitous little Cratchits. So much has changed—yet so much is still the same. You can feel the energy and hear the laughter of companies past, present, and future in this room. It is wonderful, and it's inspiring to our invention.

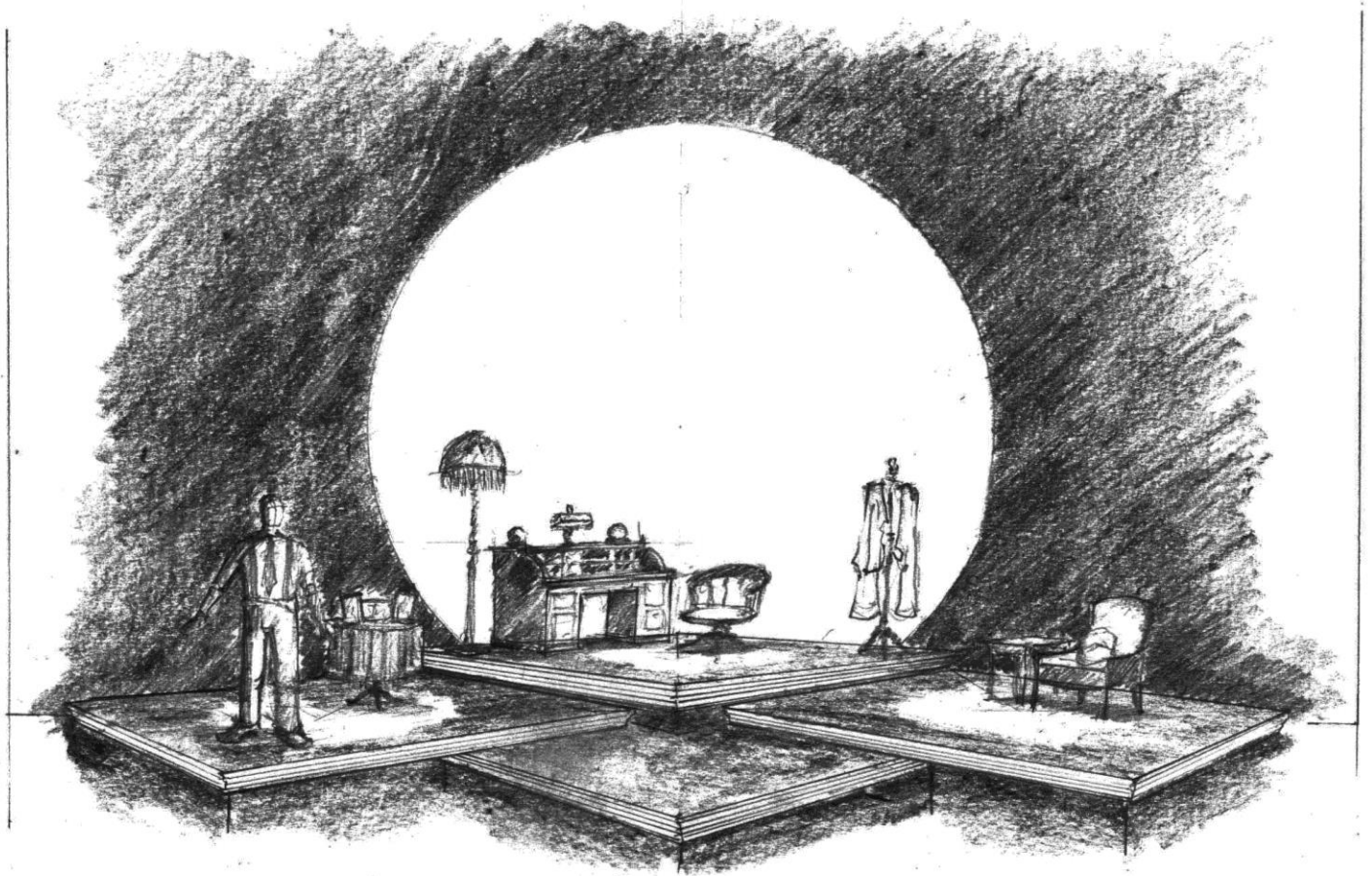
This Wonderful Life shares the virtuosic nature of our beloved *Carol*—the actor plays numerous roles and packs an epic journey into one delightful evening. Rob Johansen is speaking directly to us. He invites us to remember our responsibility to self and community. For those who have had the pleasure of hearing Rob spin a tale—onstage or off!—you know this story will be filled with madcap comedy mixed with sincerity and grace.

The great Steven Spielberg sums up this film beautifully: “Frank Capra led with his heart. His films made it shameful not to cry in the movies. He celebrated the noblest impulse of women and men, showed all of us our dark side, and then pointed a flashlight at the way out.” I hope you receive this play as our holiday card to you all: a sweet treat for your table, a warm glass of cider, some laughter around the fire, and a reminder of how much we need each other and the power of leading with our hearts.

*The final scene of
It's a Wonderful Life.*



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'WONDERFUL LIFE' INT DIR BEN HANNAH SD ROB KOHARCHIK PERSPECTIVE 9.12.20.

ROB

Preliminary sketch by scenic designer Rob Koharchik.

ROB KOHARCHIK SCENIC DESIGNER

The character in this play has a deep passion for the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*, so much passion that he is going to reenact the entire movie by himself. The design for this production centers around helping the actor on this journey. While creating the world of the play, it was important to select items that would assist in the storytelling, and help conjure up the places from the movie that so many of us fondly remember.

THIS WONDERFUL JOURNEY

AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT STEVE MURRAY

How was the project conceived? Who came up with the idea for this one-man version of *It's a Wonderful Life*?

The original idea came from Mark Setlock, a New York-based actor who's best known for co-creating (and starring in) the one-man show *Fully Committed*. In that comedy, he played the guy who takes all the calls for dinner reservations at a very "hot" Manhattan restaurant—and the dozens of people phoning nonstop, wheedling to get a table. He'd already shown how gifted he is at playing multiple characters and making split-second changes. He performed that show at Portland Center Stage (PCS) in Portland, Oregon, a few years ago. Backstage, he was constantly doing little riffs from *It's a Wonderful Life*. He told the stage manager that it was one of his favorite movies, and he wished he could perform the whole thing all by himself. And a little light bulb clicked on....

What was developmental process of the piece?

When my friends at PCS approached me about it, Mark was performing *Fully Committed* in London. So the theatre flew me out to meet him. We got together for lunch, talked about the things we loved about the movie, then sat down and watched it together on DVD. After that, we talked some more and realized we could work together on this. Eight or nine months later, after I had a bare-bones script, PCS flew Mark, our director, Martha Banta, and me to Portland to spend a week workshopping it. That translated into the three of us watching bits of the movie and having long lunches. Then I would go back to my hotel room and write/edit some more. The truth is, after a certain point, it was no longer helpful to watch the movie, because the script had to become its own animal—not a live replication of the movie, but a theatrical celebration of it.

How did you choose which bits and pieces you wanted from the movie?

Turning a 2-hour-and-10-minute movie into a stage show that comes in around half that amount of time was one of the biggest challenges I've faced. The movie is packed with wonderful characters and scenes. The real task was to keep as many of them in as I could, try not to grieve the parts I had to cut out, and (most importantly) try to tell the story as cleanly as possible—so that even people who'd never seen the movie could follow it.

What inspired you most about Capra's film?

It's a lot tougher film than people recall. Everybody thinks *It's a Wonderful Life* is just a bunch of Capra-corn. They remember the goofy angel in his nightshirt, and Zuzu's petals, and "Every time a bell rings," etc. The movie *does* have a happy ending. But to get there, it goes through some very dark, mature scenes that ask big questions about adult life, self-sacrifice and responsibilities we owe toward other people. After all, it starts with a man thinking about throwing himself off a bridge into an icy river.

Since it's a one-man show, did you have to envision how one person would do all these parts/scenes, or did you actually use the actor to create these scenes?

This was really tricky. Having seen him in *Fully Committed*, I knew Mark could make the lightning-fast changes from one character to the next. But in *that* show he had a phone headset and a switchboard as a prop. It was easy for the audience to follow when he was switching from one voice/character to another.

There's no easy convention like that in our show. Making those distinctions with his body and voice was something I left to Mark and to our original director, Martha, to figure out. Theatre is a collaborative art form. When you're a playwright, you do the best you can as a writer—but then you have to hand it over to the people who are experts at what *they* do: actors, directors, designers, and so on. That's really what makes theatre so interesting. You get to appreciate other people's skills.



How did the play evolve over time? In what ways did the script change after you put it in front of an audience?

It was in a state of flux for about a year, while I was working on it in Atlanta, and checking in with Mark by phone. The script went through several different versions—some of them really crazy, with the narrator throwing out these over-the-top jokes and comments. I think that was something I just had to get out of my system before pulling things back down to scale. Ultimately, we all just wanted to create a respectful adaptation that straddled the line between film and theatre—a holiday event that a bunch of people could enjoy together.

Why did you change the title from *It's a Wonderful Life* to *This Wonderful Life*?

Well, I didn't. Here's an insight into the practical workings of theatre companies. Even though I was writing the show up until the first week of preview performances that November, Portland Center Stage had to announce its season of plays the previous spring. "Untitled *It's a Wonderful Life* Project" doesn't really look so good in season brochures. I can't remember exactly how the show got the name *This Wonderful Life*. But once it was out there, it stuck. I don't mind it, though. The play isn't *It's a Wonderful Life*, and can't be. That's a movie. So for me, the title means: *This* is our version of *Wonderful Life*.

The play has been performed all over the regional theatre market. Did you ever foresee that your project would reap this kind of success?

No, but I'm really glad it's connecting with theatres and audiences. It's a great to see people come together and share this story—and enjoy the heroic, exhausting performance of that one actor. A lot of hard work and love went into this project, and I hope you'll enjoy what we came up with.

—*This interview was conducted by Matthew McMahan, who was a dramaturgy intern at the IRT in 2008 when the company first produced This Wonderful Life.*

AMERICA IN THE 1930S & 1940S

The Roaring Twenties were a time of prosperity in the United States of America, but they ended with a downturn. In 1929, Wall Street crashed, marking the beginning of a worldwide financial crisis known as the Great Depression. The causes of the Depression were complex, although many people blamed high consumer and business debt, poorly regulated markets, wrongdoing by bankers and investors, and especially a loss of confidence in the economic future. The causes of the Great Depression may be uncertain, but the poverty, unemployment, low profits, and lost opportunities for growth and advancement that it caused are well documented. In the four years following the stock market crash, unemployment went from 3 percent to 25 percent. Many businesses and banks closed. When the banks failed, many people lost their life savings. These financial problems were aggravated by natural calamities. In America's heartland, there was a drought. Crops died and the once rich soil turned to dust. Violent winds created dust storms that destroyed the land even further. This catastrophe was known as the Dust Bowl. Many people quit farming and moved west to find a better life. John Steinbeck wrote about their suffering and hardships in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Herbert Hoover was President at the start of the Great Depression. He believed that relief should come from the private sector, not government programs. Relief often didn't come, and many shanty towns came to be known as Hoovervilles in "honor" of the President's policies. In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated as President of the United States. FDR began the New Deal, a series of government programs meant to increase employment and help relieve the burden of the American public. Social Security, the National Recovery Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and the Civil Conservation Corps are examples of the programs that came out of the New Deal. Many people were opposed to the government's increased presence in business, but there were also many grateful people who had been frustrated by the government's lack of help early on in the Depression. FDR's New Deal helped to lower unemployment, but these measures still did not end the Depression.



These times of hardship led to an increase in lawlessness. Outlaws such as Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, Machine Gun Kelly, and John Dillinger became folk heroes. Along with those outlaws, mystery novels, movies, and radio provided an escape. Every week on the radio a fireside chat with FDR was broadcast, helping people to feel that their President was connected to them. Although a portion of the population was not significantly affected by the Depression, the economic crisis came to define a generation. The Great Depression was a worldwide problem. In some countries such as

Germany and Italy, the government was taken over by dictatorships, but in the United States democracy survived. With the start of World War II and an increased demand for war products, the country finally emerged from the Depression.

World War II was the defining event of the 1940s. It began in Europe in September 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland after years of military build-up and aggression. The United States did not become officially involved until December 8, 1941, the day after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Although Americans did not suffer the hardships experienced in Europe, Africa, and Asia, where the battles were being fought, American life did change during the war. After the United States joined the fighting, women were needed in the workplace to replace the men who were shipped off to foreign shores. To support the war effort, food, clothes, even children's toys were rationed, and communities held scrap drives to collect materials that could help. Many American soldiers died or were injured while fighting. In many neighborhoods one could see yellow stars hung in front windows representing family members who had lost their lives in the war. Internment camps were established in the United States to confine American citizens of German, Italian, and Japanese descent. Nearly 150,000 Japanese Americans and 11,000 German and Italian Americans were interned during the war.

The war ended in Europe in May 1945, when Allied forces (The United States, Great Britain, USSR, France, and other nations united against Germany, Italy, and Japan) stopped the last pockets of German resistance. Fighting stopped on the Pacific front soon after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The time following World War II was a time of prosperity and change in the United States. The country emerged from World War II as a superpower only rivaled by the USSR; conflict between the two nations soon led to the Cold War. The Marshall Plan (devised by Secretary of State George Marshall) was created to help European countries recover from the devastation of the war and thus diminish the appeal of Communism. At home many men returned to their jobs, forcing women out of the work place. The G.I. Bill offered a college education to a wide range of veterans beyond the privileged ranks of society. After experiencing less prejudiced attitudes in other countries, African American veterans found it more difficult to accept discriminatory treatment when they returned home. Men who had seen the world would not be satisfied with the old ideal of the family farm. Woman who had tasted independence wanted a more powerful place in society. Following World War II, human beings had to come to terms with the realization of the horrors of the Holocaust, the devastation of the war, and the power of nuclear weapons. After years of hardship, many people expected more in their lives and were willing to fight for it. Frank Capra deals with some of the issues that affected the American people during the thirties and forties in *It's a Wonderful Life*. In *George Bailey* he shows a man who stands up to the challenges presented by the times and does his best to make the world a better place.



WHAT IS A BUILDING & LOAN?

At the center of *It's a Wonderful Life* is the Bailey Building and Loan. To better understand the story and the position George Bailey finds himself in when he contemplates suicide, it is helpful to understand how a building and loan functions.

Bailey Building and Loan is a savings and loan, a type of bank that focuses on serving individuals. Its main services include savings accounts and loans. A savings account is used as a safe way to save money; the account will earn interest since the money is usually left in the bank for a long time. The loans from a savings and loan bank are like any bank loan, but they are often used for purchasing or building houses. This type of bank is mostly found in the United States. They are often small, local businesses that are individually owned. Many of these small banks had to close during the Great Depression because people failed to repay their loans and the banks lost all of their money and the money of their customers. Panic can lead to what is known as a bank run, when all of the customers demand their life savings be repaid to them, but the bank does not have enough money to pay everyone at once. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey is able to avoid going out of business by convincing his customers to be patient and take only what they need. He explains how his business functions and why he doesn't have the money to pay them all: "You're thinking of this all wrong. The money's not here. Your money's in Joe's house—right next to yours. And in the Kennedy house and Mrs. Macklin's house, and a hundred others." With this inspiring speech, he instills confidence in the people and saves his business.

\$8000

One of the major turning points in George Bailey's life occurs when his Uncle Billy loses \$8,000. This may not seem like a lot of money by today's standards, but \$8,000 could buy a lot more in 1945 than it does today—around \$116,000 worth.



The Citizens Loan & Trust Company, established by a group of 14 local citizens in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1900. Photo © Indiana Limestone Company. Courtesy, Indiana Geological and Water Survey, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

FILM DIRECTOR

FRANK CAPRA

Born in 1897 in Sicily, Frank Capra immigrated to California with his family when he was six years old. In high school he discovered theatre and did backstage work. While studying chemical engineering in college, Capra became interested in literature and poetry and decided to become a writer.

After serving briefly in the army at the end of World War I, Capra was hired as an extra on a John Ford film. He began to write shorts for "Our Gang" and other silent film comedians. He got his chance as a director with comedian Harry Langdon, and in 1927 he began directing for Columbia Pictures.

Capra directed more than 50 films during his career. Among the most memorable are *It Happened One Night* (1934; five Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Director), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936, Oscar: Best Director), *You Can't Take It with You* (1938; Oscars: Best Picture and Best Director), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Meet John Doe* (1941). During World War II, Capra joined the military and made propaganda films. Capra's first film after the war was *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Frank Capra died in 1991, but he lives on through his films. His work stands out because of its humor, as well as his David-like protagonists who fight against corrupt political bosses and evil-minded industrialists. Capra's films are criticized by some as too sentimental, but his work aptly represents the conflict between cynicism and idealism. Capra and his most important protagonists, like George Bailey of *It's a Wonderful Life*, didn't always experience the life they expected, but they worked hard and demonstrated the value of the individual and their ability to make a difference and live the American Dream.



Above: Frank Capra and Jimmy Stewart working on It's a Wonderful Life.

TALKING TO A FRIEND ABOUT DEPRESSION OR SUICIDE

In *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey considers suicide on Christmas Eve. While recent studies have shown that suicide does not increase during the holiday season, as once thought, the same studies confirmed that depression does increase at this time of year. Only 1 in 5 teens seek help for their depression or suicidal thoughts. Don't hesitate to reach out to your friend and encourage them to seek mental health services and get the help they need. If you are worried that a friend may be contemplating suicide, or if they are displaying warning signs, speak up.

Remember: It's not important how you ask, it's important that you ask.

WHAT TO DO IF A FRIEND COMES TO YOU FOR HELP

Don't panic! Remain calm and remember that you can help.

Listen carefully. Let your friend know that you care. Be supportive and don't judge them.

Take it seriously.

Seek help. Get a trusted adult to help you.

Ask if they are thinking about suicide.

Do not leave your friend alone. If you cannot stay with them, find someone you trust.

WHAT NOT TO DO IF A FRIEND COMES TO YOU FOR HELP

Don't promise to keep it a secret. It is important to get help.

Don't be afraid to ask them directly.

Don't say "I know how you feel". Listen openly to what they have to say. Make it about them.

Don't suggest that something is "wrong" with them because they feel this way.

Don't ignore your friend. It takes courage to ask for help and they chose you.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

Ask if you can talk with them alone in private.

Ask questions to get them to open up.

"I'm worried about you. How are you doing?"

"You haven't been acting like yourself lately. Is everything okay?"

"You seem really down. Are you okay?"

Listen to their story and allow them to talk freely.

Express concern and caring. Ask if they have thought about ending their life.

"Are you thinking about suicide?"

"Do you want to kill yourself?"

Have resources available and encourage them to seek mental health services.

"Seeking help can take courage, but it's the smart thing to do."

"I know reaching out for help can be scary, but I want to help you."

—courtesy of Community Health Network

www.HaveHope.com/teen

RESOURCES

FOR DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

WEBSITES

<http://www.havehope.com>

Community Health Network

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Lifeline Crisis Chat is a service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This free service can provide online emotional support, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention services. Connect with chat specialist 24/7 from your computer.

PHONE NUMBERS

National Hotline | 800.273.8255

If you're in a crisis, having suicidal thoughts or emotional distress, call this national hotline for free 24/7.

Community Behavioral Health Services | 317.621.5700

To schedule an appointment with a mental health professional, call Community Behavioral Health Services at 317.621.5700.

APPS

Jason Foundation: A Friend Asks

A free app that provides the information, tools and resources to help a friend (or yourself) who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide.

Lifebuoy

A free self-help app that assists suicide survivors as they normalize their lives after a recent attempt.

For direct links to these apps, go to:

<http://www.havehope.com/teen/resources/>

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT GUIDE

We recognize that teachers aim to align their lesson plans with standards and that it is important to be able to align your experience at IRT with curriculum standards. Streaming IRT's production of *This Wonderful Life* is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of the text and key elements of classic literature. Some standards to consider for this show would be:

READING - LITERATURE

- RL.1 – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
 - Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
 - Sample: 6 .RL.3.1: Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a work of literature and contributes to the development of the theme, characterization, setting, or plot.
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

READING - VOCABULARY

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
 - Sample: 6.RV.3.1: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the works of literature, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- SL.2 – Refine and apply reciprocal communication skills by participating in a range of collaborative discussions.
 - Sample 7.SL.2.2: Investigate and reflect on ideas under discussion by identifying specific evidence from materials under study and other resources.

MEDIA LITERACY

- ML.1 – Develop and enhance understanding of the roles of media and techniques and strategies used to achieve various purposes.
- MS.2 – Analyze the purposes of media and the ways in which media can have influences.
 - Sample 7.ML.2.1: Interpret the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image-makers to influence the public.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

Discuss what makes us who we are. What determines our character? What guides our actions?

What does the expression “No man is an island” mean to you?

Throughout history, leaders have called citizens to action. What do you believe is the value and impact of an individual? Consider this question in light of issues we face today, such as our carbon footprint, the economy, or war. How has the recent election process brought such ideas to the forefront?

Discuss what elements are necessary for good storytelling.

In groups, talk about holiday traditions. Open your discussion to personal, regional, national, and worldwide holiday events that have become traditions. What has this time of year come to mean to many different peoples?

Discuss the positive and negative influences of money in our world. What is true wealth?

Divide into groups, each researching a different decade. Collect pictures of the clothes. Find phrases that made their way into the culture. What were the major occupations of the time, the foods, recreation, mannerisms, etiquette, and so forth? Have the groups report their findings in chronological order to show what has changed, what has dropped out of existence, and what has endured the test of time.



AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

How does the use of a single actor affect your impression of the story? In what ways did he bring the audience into the story? What do you think about the authors' addition to the film's script? What did the actor do to show which character he was playing?

How did watching *This Wonderful Life* streaming on screen affect your experience of the play? Compare it to a play you have seen in the theatre. How was it different? How was it the same?

No one ever discovers that Mr. Potter took the money from Uncle Billy. Why do you suppose the writers didn't have him punished for stealing? How does Mr. Potter suffer for his attitudes and actions?

The movie was not a great success initially. Why do you think it is now considered one of the best Christmas movies? How have changes in the world since the movie was made affected our perception of it? How would you make this movie today?

Why do so many people pray for George and give him money when he needs it? How do George's previous actions indirectly save his life when he is contemplating suicide?

Some critics have said that Frank Capra's films, including *It's a Wonderful Life*, are too sentimental and not realistic. After seeing this play, do you agree or disagree? Why?

How might Bedford Falls have been different if George Bailey had left town and traveled the world? Would he have been any happier? Would he have ever come back?

It's a Wonderful Life is considered an American classic. What other films, plays, books, or songs would you consider quintessentially American works of art? What distinguishes a piece of art as distinctly American?

Compare and contrast this story with another holiday story such as *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Are there common themes in stories written for this season? Think about setting, mood, tone, and the point of view of the author and the main character.

We don't learn much about why Mr. Potter is the way he is. Knowing what we do about Bedford Falls, its citizens, and the time period in which this story takes place, what might have happened in Mr. Potter's life to make him the person we meet in the story?

George says many wonderful things about his father to Mr. Potter in the Building & Loan board meeting: "Why, in the 25 years since he and Uncle Billy started this thing, he never once thought of himself.... In my book he died a much richer man than you'll ever be!" At the end of the play, Harry toasts George as "the richest man in town." What do these two speeches tell you about George and his father? How are they similar or different? How are you similar to or different from your parents?

WRITING PROMPTS

Write a letter to someone who has had a major impact on your life. Talk about why that person is important to you and how their action affected you.

Choose a famous person in history and write an essay about how the course of history would be different if he or she had never been born. Include how your own life would be altered.

There are a number of movies about angels coming to earth, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, *Heaven Can Wait*, *City of Angels*, and *Michael* to name just a few. Write your own story about an angelic intervention as a play for a Zoom reading. Think about what type of angel comes, what is in need of change, what does the angel do to effect that change, and the angel's voice or manner of speaking.

Bedford Falls is a small town trying to progress. Write an article for your school newspaper about the town or city where you live. What has changed since you were born? Who are the community leaders and other influential people? What impact have they had on the direction of your town or city? Consider the things that you believe to be positive and/or a hindrance.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting— as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? How did watching this play streaming rather than live affect your experience? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: education.irt@gmail.com

ACTIVITIES

Interview someone who was alive during the 1930s and 1940s about what life was like at that time. Ask about everyday needs such as the price of a loaf of bread and a ticket to the movies, weekend activities, popular toys. What did their parents do for living? Do they remember rationing and what they did for the war effort?

Draw a picture or describe your idea of an angel. Consider what angels symbolize, types of angels and their traditional roles, the contemporary function of angels in society, and stories you have heard of encounters with angels.

In the end, George comes to see the gifts life has given him and how he has been a gift to others. Make a list of the gifts life has given you. How have you been a gift to others?

George talks about the many places he would like to visit in his life. List some places where you would like to go and why you want to go there. How do people benefit from travel? How does travel benefit society as a whole?

Make a time line of your family. Start with the birth of a family elder and continue to the most recent birth in your family. In this time line include wars, major discoveries, pop culture, books, political events, natural disasters, and other significant events that have had an impact on your family's lives.

Take a couple of scenes from your favorite movie, create a script for a one-person adaptation, and perform it. Remember all the tools the actor in the play uses to portray the different characters in *This Wonderful Life*. Think about who your storyteller is and how that "character/narrator" feels about the story as he or she is moving it along. Possible movies might include *Shrek*, *The Princess Bride*, *Casablanca*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Star Wars*, or any other movie you love.

THE TIES THAT BIND: A MAPPING EXERCISE

Write the name George Bailey on a sheet of paper, along with the names of four other characters in the story. Draw lines to connect George with each of these characters. Above the lines that connect George to the characters, write who they are to him in the "real" life George leads, and below the line write who they became when he does not exist.

Next, map yourself and your relationship to four people in your life. Above the line write how you are connected, and below the line write how your life would be different without that relationship. Challenge yourself to choose a wide range of people you know, not only family members and close friends.

IN THEIR SHOES: AN EXERCISE IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Explore the lives of those individuals who lived during the Great Depression and World War II. Using images and/or portraits from these time periods as inspiration, create character biographies that explore the thoughts and emotions of the subjects in the photographs.

—In an open space, place photos of characters in a circle on the floor. As students enter the room, have them each sit by a photo they are drawn to. Ask the students to study the picture. Notice every aspect of physical appearance: clothing (color, fit, style, etc.), expression, stance, etc. Once students feel they have a sense of the character's physical appearance, ask them to lie on their backs.

—Have students close their eyes and visualize the person they saw in the photo. Ask them to remember every detail that they can. Begin to visualize how the character moves, sits, and walks through the environment seen in the picture. When each student can envision this, have the students walk around the room and bring their attention to certain aspects of movement: tempo, body center, stance, etc.

—Next ask students to write inner monologues for their characters: what the character is thinking during the moment the photograph was snapped. Ask for volunteers to share their monologues with the entire group.

—*this exercise courtesy of Pittsburgh Public Theatre*

RESOURCES

BOOKS

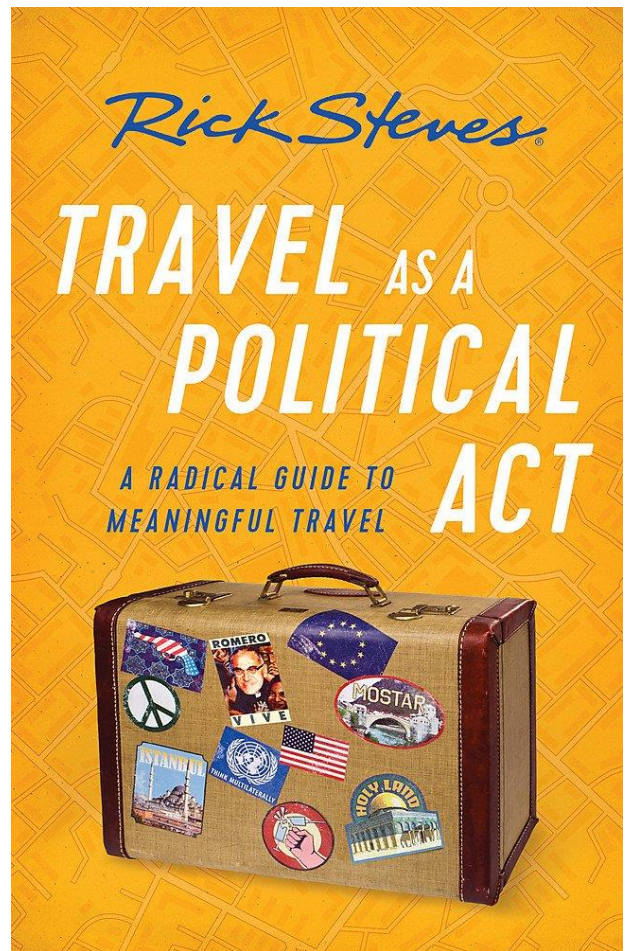
The Name Above the Title by Frank Capra
American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra
 by Ray Carney
The Essential It's a Wonderful Life by Michael William
The It's a Wonderful Life Book by Jeanine Basinger
The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck

FOR OLDER READERS

The Forgotten Man:
A New History of the Great Depression
 by Amity Shlaes
The Story of World War II by Donald L. Miller
Travel as a Political Act by Rick Steves

FOR YOUNGER READERS

The Great Depression: Cornerstones of Freedom
 by Elaine Landau
World War II by Simon Adams
Money and Banking by Norman L. Macht



WEBSITES

It's a Wonderful Life: <http://www.reelclassics.com/Movies/Wonlife/wonlife.htm>
 photos and information about the movie and people involved in making the film

<http://www.memorableplaces.com/iawlring/iawlringmain.html>
 a site for fans of the movie to share their love of the film

the time period: <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/snprelief.htm>
 photos and information about American life in the 1930s

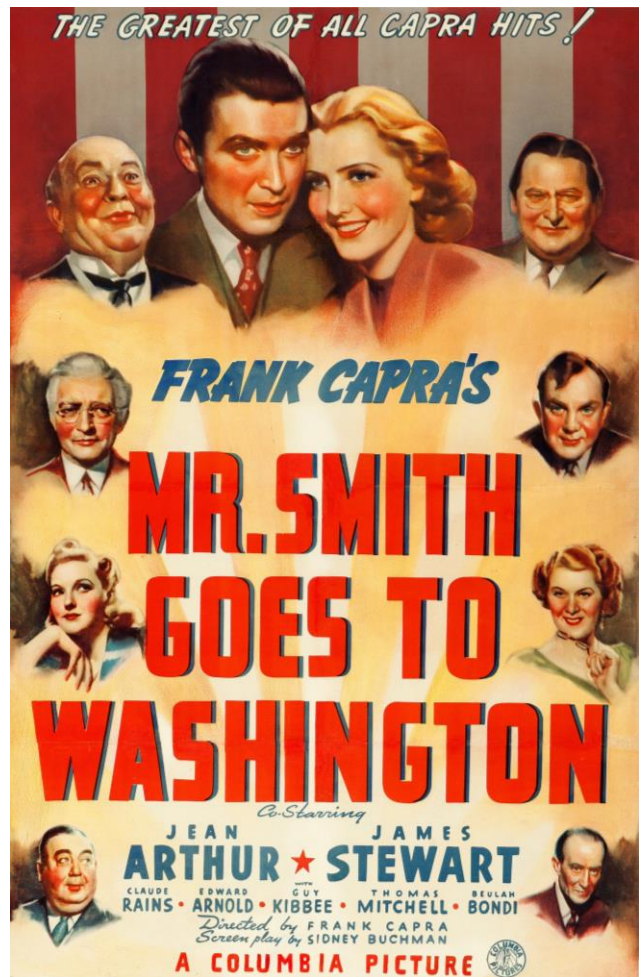
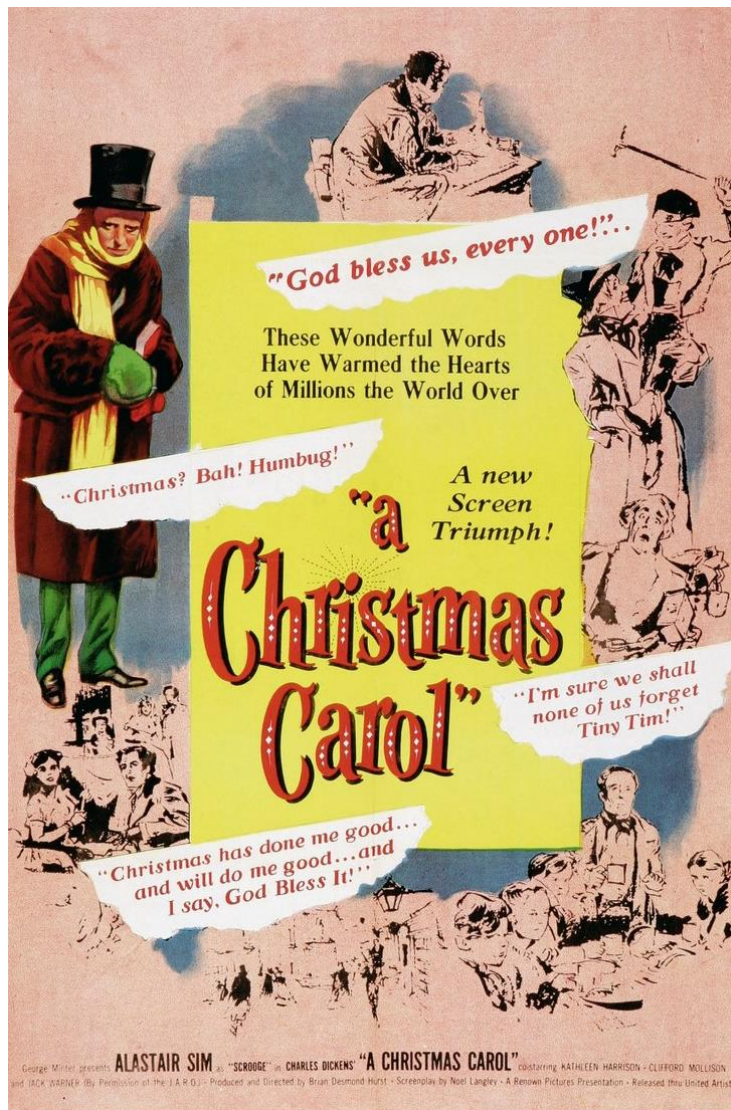
<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade40.html>
 photos and information about American life in the 1940s

banking: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs027.htm>
 information about the nature of banking and different kinds of financial institutions

FILMS

OTHER FRANK CAPRA FILMS

- It Happened One Night* (1934)
- Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936)
- Lost Horizon* (1937)
- You Can't Take it with You* (1938)
- Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)
- Meet John Doe* (1941)
- Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944)
- State of the Union* (1948)
- A Pocketful of Miracles* (1961)



OTHER CLASSIC CHRISTMAS MOVIES

- Christmas in Connecticut* (1942)
- The Bishop's Wife* (1947)
- Miracle on 34th Street* (1947)
- A Christmas Carol* (Alistair Sim, 1951)
- White Christmas* (1954)
- The Homecoming* (TV, 1971)
- A Christmas Story* (1983)
- A Christmas Carol* (TV, George C. Scott, 1984)
- Scrooged* (1988)
- The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992)
- The Nightmare before Christmas* (1993)
- Elf* (2003)
- Love, Actually* (2003)
- The Polar Express* (2004)

GLOSSARY

Page

1 “Buffalo gals won’t you come out tonight”

A Traditional American song, first published in 1844 as “Lubly Fan.” It was performed throughout the United States and often altered to fit the local audience, changing the lyrics to New York gals or Boston gals. The most famous version refers to Buffalo, New York.

1 boil

An inflamed pus-filled swelling on the skin, caused typically by the infection of a hair follicle.

1 scurvy

As an adjective, arousing disgust or scorn; from the disease scurvy, caused by a lack of vitamin C and characterized by spongy gums, loosening of the teeth, and a bleeding into the skin and mucous membranes

3 dotty

Amiably eccentric.

5 *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Published in 1876, Mark Twain’s first novel focuses on a mischievous young boy growing up in the pre-Civil War South along the Mississippi River.

8 Tahiti

An Island in the South Pacific, located midway between Mexico and Australia, 2600 miles south of Hawaii. Its lush jungles, warm waters, and luxurious resorts have long made it a popular vacation destination. The crew of the HMS Bounty mutinied while visiting Tahiti. The French painter Paul Gauguin lived and painted in Tahiti in the 1890s.

8 Fiji Islands

An island nation in the South Pacific, about 1300 miles north of New Zealand. It is composed of 322 islands, of which 106 are permanently inhabited. Fiji has one of the most developed economies in the Pacific through its abundant forest, mineral, and fish resources. The economy is powered by the tourist industry, bottled water exports, and sugar cane.

8 Coral Sea

A part of the South Pacific, northeast of Australia off the Queensland coast and south of the Solomon Islands. It includes the Great Barrier Reef, which is the largest coral reef system in the world.

8 I’ve been nominated for membership on the National Geographic Society!

Based in Washington D.C., the National Geographic Society is one of the largest non-profit scientific and educational institutions in the world. Its interests include geography, archaeology, natural science, environmental and historical conservation, and the study of world culture and history. The Society publishes *National Geographic* magazine. For many years, subscriptions to this popular magazine were marketed as memberships in the Society.

8 harem

The wives, concubines, and women servants of a polygamous household.

8 died of the flu

Prior to Covid-19, the influenza outbreak of 1918 was the most severe worldwide pandemic since the 14th century bubonic plague. Between 1918 and 1920, 500 million people worldwide came down with the flu; 100 million died.

9 Captain Cook

Captain James Cook (1728-1779) was an English explorer, navigator, and mapmaker. In three voyages across the South Pacific, he mapped lands from New Zealand to Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean in greater detail and on a scale not previously charted by Western explorers.

9 squall

A sudden shower or downpour; often at sea.

12 “a thousand and one nights”

A collection of stories gathered over many centuries, starting around the 9th century CE, from authors and scholars all over the Middle East. The stories are framed by the tale of a Persian King who, after discovering his wife’s infidelity, executes her. Every day he marries a new virgin only to execute her the next morning. When Scheherazade marries him, she begins to tell him a story, but does not finish it; the king keeps her alive so she may finish it the next night. Each night Scheherazade finishes one tale only to start a new one, and this goes on for a thousand and one nights. Each of Scheherazade’s stories is different; they cover a wide range of topics.

12 Baghdad

The largest city and capital of Iraq, located on the Tigris River. It dates back to the 8th century and was once the center of the Islamic world and a center of learning.

12 Samarkand

The second largest city in Uzbekistan, a country in central Asia and a former member of the Soviet Union. It is known for its position on trading routes from China and as a center of Islamic scholarly study.

13 Alfalfa ... “The Little Rascals”

“The Little Rascals” was a series of film shorts from the 1920s and 1930s about a group of neighborhood kids and their adventures. The actor Carl Switzer, who played the popular character Alfalfa in the series, also appeared in the original film *It’s a Wonderful Life* as the character Freddie.

14 “Oyez oyez oyez!”

A traditional interjection that is repeated three times to introduce the opening of a court of law. It could be translated as “hear ye.” The term “oyez” was common in medieval England and is still used by the United States Supreme Court at the beginning of each session.

14 Charleston

A lively dance that was popular in the 1920s.

17 Parthenon

The temple of Athena built in the 5th century B.C. on the Acropolis, a high, flat-topped, sacred rock, in Athens, the capital of Greece.

17 Colosseum

A large outdoor arena in Rome, Italy. It was one of the greatest engineering and architectural accomplishments of the Ancient Roman Empire. It was originally used for gladiator contests and other public spectacles.

18 stroke

A serious medical emergency that can cause permanent brain damage or death. Strokes are the result of disruptions in the blood vessels supplying blood to the brain.

18 board of directors

A group of elected or appointed people who oversee the activities of a business or organization.

19 vote-of-confidence

A vote showing support of something, such as a parliament voting that they support the government.

20 “My Wild Irish Rose”

A song written in 1899 by Chancellor Olcott, an American actor, singer, and songwriter, for his production *A Romance of Athlone*. It has become an American classic.

23 moss-back

Literally, an old fish or turtle with a greenish growth of algae on its back. Also used to describe an extremely old-fashioned person.

26 Bermuda

Bermuda is a British Territory located right off the east coast of the United States, a group of Islands in the West Atlantic Ocean. Its balmy climate and beautiful beaches have contributed to a large tourist industry.

26 called our loan

It was not uncommon for small building and loan organizations to borrow money short-term from larger banks to help with the ebb and flow of liquid cash reserves. During this bank run, in order to pay its own customers, the bank has demanded that the building and loan pay off its loan earlier than expected.

27 “I will pay them 50 cents on the dollar”

If the Building and Loan members sign their accounts over to Potter, he will pay them 50 cents for every dollar they have deposited. The customers will only get half the money they originally deposited, but eventually Potter will be able to obtain the full amount of those accounts from the Building and Loan.

28 Grandma Walton

A character from the 1970s American television series *The Waltons*. Actress Ellen Corby, who played Grandma Walton on the series, played Mrs. Davis in *It's a Wonderful Life*.

28 Waldorf Hotel

A famous luxury hotel in New York City.

29 bellhop

A person employed by a hotel to carry luggage and do errands.

29 “Entray, Monsoor”

A mispronunciation of the French phrase “entréz, Monsieur,” which means “Enter, sir.”

29 “Song of the Islands”

“Na Lei O Hawaii” by Charles E. King, a popular Hawaiian song written in 1925.

30 “I Love You Truly”

A popular song written in 1906 by Carrie Jacobs Bond.

30 “cotton to”

To taking a liking to something.

31 “The Last Temptation of George”

The Last Temptation of Christ is a 1951 novel written by Nikos Kazantzakis about the life of Jesus Christ from his perspective. In the novel, Jesus, while free from sin, is still tempted by those things that human beings must face, such as fear, doubt, reluctance, depression, and lust. The novel was made into a movie in 1988. Both book and film faced much criticism due to their controversial depiction of Jesus.

34 Silver Star

A United States military decoration awarded for extreme bravery in action.

34 Africa

Africa was one of the important areas of fighting during the Second World War. The fighting in Africa mostly took place from 1940 to 1943.

34 Ernie the cabbie parachutes into France

The liberation of France began with the invasion of Normandy, which started on June 6, 1944, when allied troops parachuted onto the beaches of Normandy.

34 draft board

A civilian board that registers, classifies, and selects men for forced military service.

35 transport

A ship or vehicle used for carrying soldiers or military equipment.

35 Congressional Medal of Honor

The highest Military decoration awarded by the United States government. It is given to someone who displays extreme bravery at the risk of his own life beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States.

35 the president's wife

Bess Truman. Harry Truman became president when Franklin Roosevelt died in April 1945, just before the end of World War II.

35 bank examiner

A representative of a bank who closely inspects the transactions of a business to make sure that everything is on order.

37 hock

To pawn or sell.

39 pneumonia

A disease of the lungs which causes fever, chills, cough, and difficulty breathing. It is often caused by an infection.

43 life insurance ... a fifteen thousand dollar policy

A type of insurance that will pay specified amount of money to a designated person if and when the insured person dies. It is meant to compensate the survivors for the loss of income and any final expenses. "A fifteen thousand dollar policy" means that George Bailey has life insurance that will pay his family fifteen thousand dollars upon his death.

43 misappropriation of funds

To wrongly take or use money.

43 manipulation

To control something by using unfair actions to benefit oneself.

43 malfeasance

Wrongdoing or misconduct, especially by a public official.

46 tollhouse

A house or booth where a fee is paid for some privilege, such as using a bridge or a road.

46 nightshirt

A loose garment, resembling a shirt, meant to be worn in bed.

46 Mark Twain

American humorist (1835-1910) who wrote *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* among other works.

47 Gabriel

An archangel, considered the guardian angel of Israel. In the Bible, the Gospel of Luke relates the stories of the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah and the Virgin Mary, foretelling the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, respectively.

48 ambient

Surrounding on all sides; referring to an encompassing environment.

48 lewd

Obscene or vulgar; something of a sexual nature that is seen as immoral.

48 flaming rum punch

A mixed alcoholic drink made with rum, fruit juices, and other sweeteners that has been set on fire to caramelize the sugar.

48 mulled wine

A typically red wine that has been combined with spices and is usually served warm. It is a traditional drink during winter, particularly during the Christmas season.

48 characters

Interesting or notable people; people with obvious traits that attract attention.

48 rotgut

A cheap or inferior liquor.

49 pixie

A mischievous or harmful and annoying spirit or person.

49 Adam's off ox

An old American expression that means someone you don't know. It comes from the expression "not to know someone from Adam" and from the term "off ox," which refers to the ox on the right of a team of oxen. This ox is farther away from the driver and therefore less well known.

49 seltzer

Artificially carbonated water.

51 jitterbug club

A lively dance club.

51 paddy wagon

An enclosed truck used to transport prisoners.

56 What the Sam Hill

An American slang phrase that is used as a euphemism for "what the hell" or "what the devil." Its origin is unknown, but it first appeared in print in 1926.

57 emporium

A store carrying various kinds of goods; a general store or department store

59 charge accounts

A customer's account with a business to which purchases of goods are charged with the promise of later payment.

60 cable

To send by a telegraph.

60 advance

To supply with the expectance of repayment.

60 "Auld Lang Syne"

A famous Scottish poem written in 1788 by Robert Burns. It was set to a traditional folk song and is regularly sung at midnight on New Year's Eve to celebrate the New Year. The phrase "auld lang syne" could be translated into the common modern English phrases "days gone by" or "long long ago." The song is sung in several Frank Capra films.

